

Artsource

*The Music Center's Study Guide
to the Performing Arts*

TRADITIONAL

CLASSICAL

CONTEMPORARY

EXPERIMENTAL

MULTI-MEDIA

ARTISTIC PROCESSES

1. CREATING (Cr)

2. PERFORMING, PRESENTING, PRODUCING (Pr)

3. RESPONDING (Re)

4. CONNECTING (Cn)

TRANSFORMATION

ENDURING
VALUESFREEDOM &
OPPRESSIONTHE POWER
OF NATURETHE HUMAN
FAMILY

Title of Work:

Songs and Stories of My People

Creator:

Storyteller: Geri Keams b.1951

Background Information:

Geri Keams was born and raised on the Navajo Nation in the Painted Desert region of Arizona. Her grandmother, a well-known Navajo rug weaver, taught her the importance of passing on the stories of the 'Old Ones.' Geri has shared these stories in schools and museums all over the United States. She graduated from the University of Arizona with a degree in drama and continued her studies at Cafe La Mama in New York City. Geri is also an accomplished actress, best known for her role in the classic western, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, with Clint Eastwood. A published poet, her work can be found in the anthologies: *The Remembered Earth*, *A Gathering of Spirit*, and *When Clouds Threw This Light*. Geri is one of five Native American storytellers featured in an audio cassette and book series by Harper and Row and Parabola documenting authentic Indian myths and legends.

About The Artwork:

Geri Keams dramatically brings traditional Native American myths and legends to life on stage. Her stories come from many tribes and include: Trickster Coyote Tales, Creation Stories, Spiderwoman Stories, Serpent Tales, and Animal Legends. *The Quillwork Girl*, featured on an audio recording with this unit, tells the tale of a young girl with an extraordinary talent for embroidering porcupine quills on buckskin. Her dreams reveal the presence of seven brothers whom she travels to

meet, and the legend of their life together explains the creation of the Big Dipper. Geri also sings ceremonial chants, such as *The Beauty Way*, *Four Directions Chant*, *Sunrise Chant*, and *Navajo Gift Songs*. Her unique story telling performance communicates the experiences of Native American tradition and culture in ways that are educational, entertaining and memorable.

Creative Process of the Artist or Culture:

Geri's stories come from one of two sources: ones she has heard, passed down orally by relatives and friends, or stories she has found in anthologies of Native American tales and legends. Whatever the source, each story in her repertoire must move her in a deep sense; she must feel a strong connection to the material. After Geri has heard or read a story, she then puts it into her own words. Next she transcribes her version of the story and uses that as a kind of 'script.' As she practices



Photo by Chris Emerick, courtesy of Segrestrom Center for the Arts

"I am a weaver of words. Storytelling gives me the opportunity to intertwine the tradition of orally handed down stories of the Native American cultures with the contemporary experiences of my life and lives which continue to survive in the present age."

Geri Keams

telling the story, she strives to find its true voice and its natural rhythm. No two tellings are exactly the same, for the art of the storyteller is, in part, the ability to embellish stories as one makes them his or her own.



Discussion Questions:

After listening to the audio recording:

- What story do you remember most vividly?
- What were the settings for the stories?
- Did you notice anything unique about the language of the stories?
- What characters or symbols appeared in the stories?
- What came to mind as you listened to the Navajo ceremonial chants?
- Did this singing sound like any other vocalizing you have heard before?
- Were there events in the myths and legends that seemed fantastic or larger than life?
- Did animal characters take on human personalities or have special powers?
- If you could choose three adjectives to describe *The Quillwork Girl*, what would they be?
- What were your impressions of the Buffalo Nation as characterized in the story?
- Who was the hero in *The Quillwork Girl*?
- *The Quillwork Girl* tells about the creation of the Big Dipper. Do you know any other myths or legends about the constellations?
- Did any of the stories remind you of stories from your own culture? Give examples.

Multidisciplinary Options:

- Native Americans used a type of sign or notation called pictographs which were painted on tree bark or animal skins. Find examples to use for mural-making, telling a simple story with selected symbols or images.
- Many tribes wear headdresses and elaborate costume pieces in their rituals and ceremonies. Create masks and/or costumes patterned after those used by, for example, the Zuni or Eskimo peoples. Incorporate them into a story theatre presentation. Refer to the *Artsource*® Unit, *May Day Parade*, Sample Lesson I.
- Research and study the scientific theories about the migration of America's first immigrants. How do scientists envision the geography of the world's land mass at that time? How does it compare to the map or globe as we know it today?

Audio-Visual Materials:

- *Artsource*® video and audio track: *The Quillwork Girl*, courtesy of Geri Keams and Let's Tell Stories.
- *Artsource*® video: *Storytellers: Geri Keams*, courtesy of Geri Keams and The Girl Scouts of the USA.

Additional References:

- Dutton, Bertha and Olin, Caroline. *Myths & Legends of the Indians of the Southwest*. Bellerophon Books, Santa Barbara, CA: 1988.
- Erdoes, Richard and Ortiz, Alfonso. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. Pantheon Books, New York, NY: 1984.

Sample Experiences:

LEVEL I

- Tell one thing that happened in a myth or legend from the program.
- Draw a picture of one of the characters you liked.
- Visit your school library to find a book of Native American stories and read one.
- * • Make a sand painting based on a traditional design.
- Select several images from the American Indian symbols on page 6. Create a story about them.

LEVEL II

- * • Dramatize an Indian legend. Have one person act as a narrator and have others pantomime the action.
- Research the geographical locations of various Indian homelands. Mark the areas with flags on a map of the United States.
- Read a collection of *Trickster Tales* about Hare, Coyote or Raven.

LEVEL III

- Create a myth (such as, "why the moon has phases") explaining a mystery or phenomenon and transcribe it.
- * • Compose song-poems based on Navajo ceremonial chants.
- Become a storyteller, and relate a Native American legend or myth in your own words.



Quillwork on buckskin bag
Ojibway

SAND PAINTING TRANSFORMATION

LEVEL I Sample Lesson

INTRODUCTION:

Sand painting is used by Navajo medicine men to drive away evil spirits. It is part of a “sing” which is the Navajo name for a great number of rituals. The medicine man, who is also an artist, chants while sifting different colors of sand through his fingers. At the end of the ceremony, a sick person is carefully laid on the sand painting to be near his gods. The medicine man dips his fingers first into a liquid and then into the sand painting, transferring some of the sand to the patient's skin, bringing him in tune with its symbolic meaning and giving him some of its power. Sand paintings are sacred. It is believed that they must be destroyed by sunset of the day they are begun. After the ceremony, the sand is thrown in four directions to confuse the evil spirits. There are more than 500 traditional sand painting designs and chants.

OBJECTIVES:

Students will be able to:

- Make a traditional sand painting using the images provided, or ones from their research. (Creating & Presenting)
- Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to *Assessment* at the end of this lesson. (Responding & Connecting)

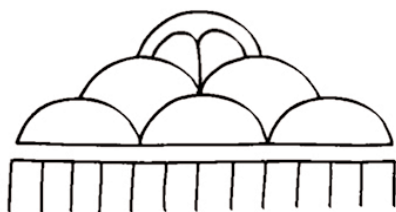
MATERIALS:

- Fine sand or salt of various colors (see recipe); jars or bowls for mixing and stirring the sand; heavy cardboard or sandpaper; paper cone or spoon; varnish, shellac, glue or paste; watercolor paint; carbon paper (to transfer design); brushes or Q-tips for gluing; toothpicks; tempera and paint brushes.

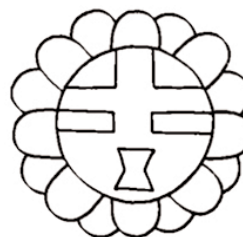
RECIPE for colored sand and colored salt:

Place sand (use white sand for best results) or salt on a piece of wrapping paper or several thicknesses of newspaper. Combine with powdered chalk or tempera until a color of sufficient depth is obtained.

Traditional Sand Painting Images



Hopi Design symbolizing clouds and rain.



The Sun Symbol

PROGRESSION:

- Sketch or trace a design on the cardboard sheet.
- Use tempera paint to brush in the background colors where sand is not desired.
- Choose the area to be done in a particular color sand and paint a thin coat of shellac, varnish, glue or paste on these parts (paint a small area at a time).
- Trickle or sprinkle the colored sand from a paper cone or spoon onto the areas that have been covered with paste, varnish or white shellac.
- Allow the work to dry for a few minutes, then lift the work and tap it lightly so excess sand is removed.
- Repeat this process for all additional colors until the picture is completed.

Note: Native Americans poured sand from the hand along the second joint of the index finger. The thumb was used to stop the flow of sand.

EXTENSIONS:

- Create an original symbol which embodies an aspect of nature or life to use as a sand painting pattern.
- Study the role of the medicine man in Native American tribes and find his counterpart in other ethnic groups and cultures.

VOCABULARY: sand painting, “sing,” ritual, symbol

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DESCRIBE: Describe the design you made and what it symbolizes.

DISCUSS: Discuss how doing a sand painting is different than creating a painting with paint.

ANALYZE: Discuss the traditional reasons for making sand paintings and how this is different from making a sand painting for enjoyment.

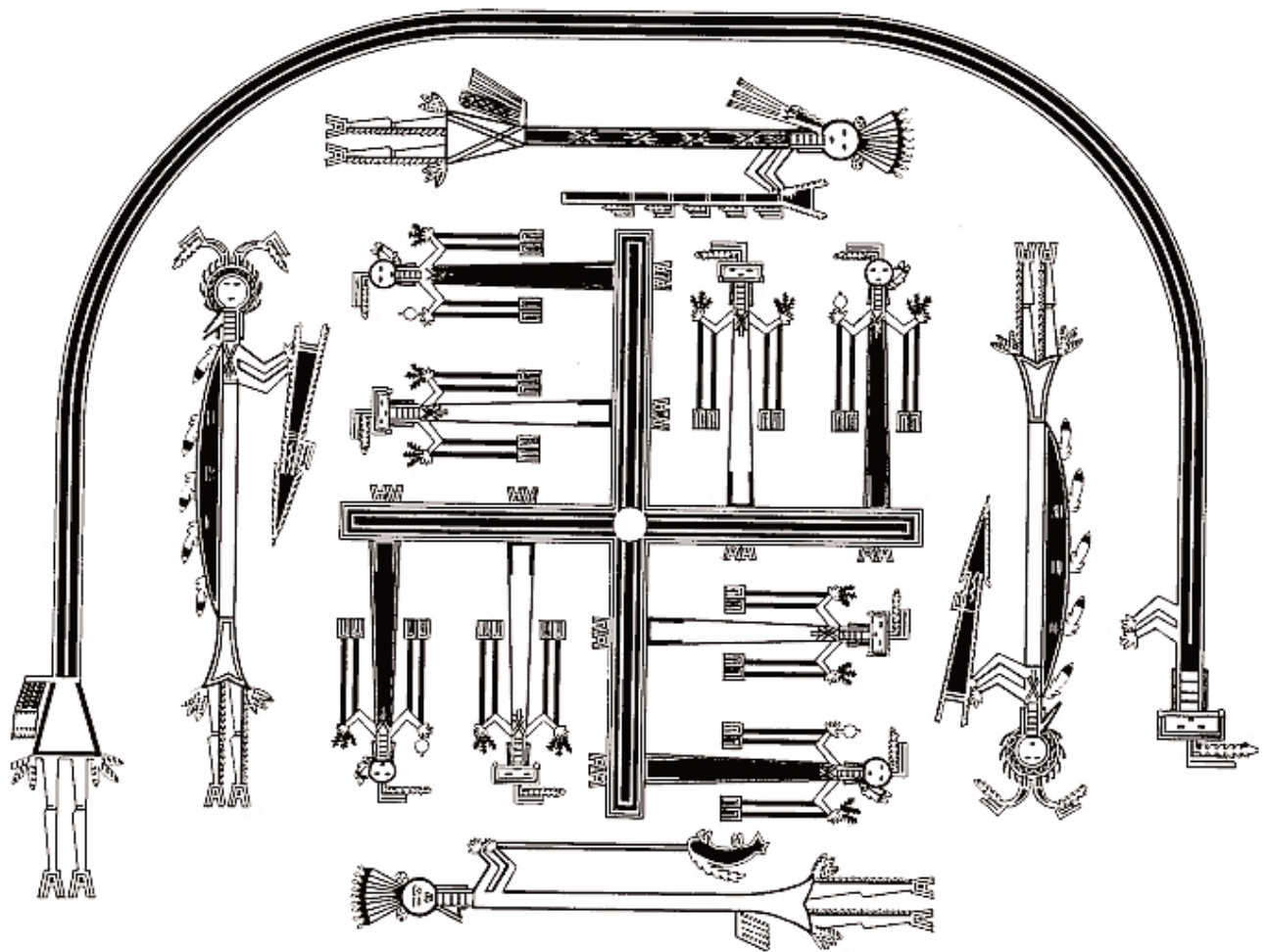
CONNECT: Discuss some of things that people do in your culture to help sick people get well.

Emphasis on: Common Core - CA State Standards for Language - Reading; Writing; Listening; Speaking



Geri Keams

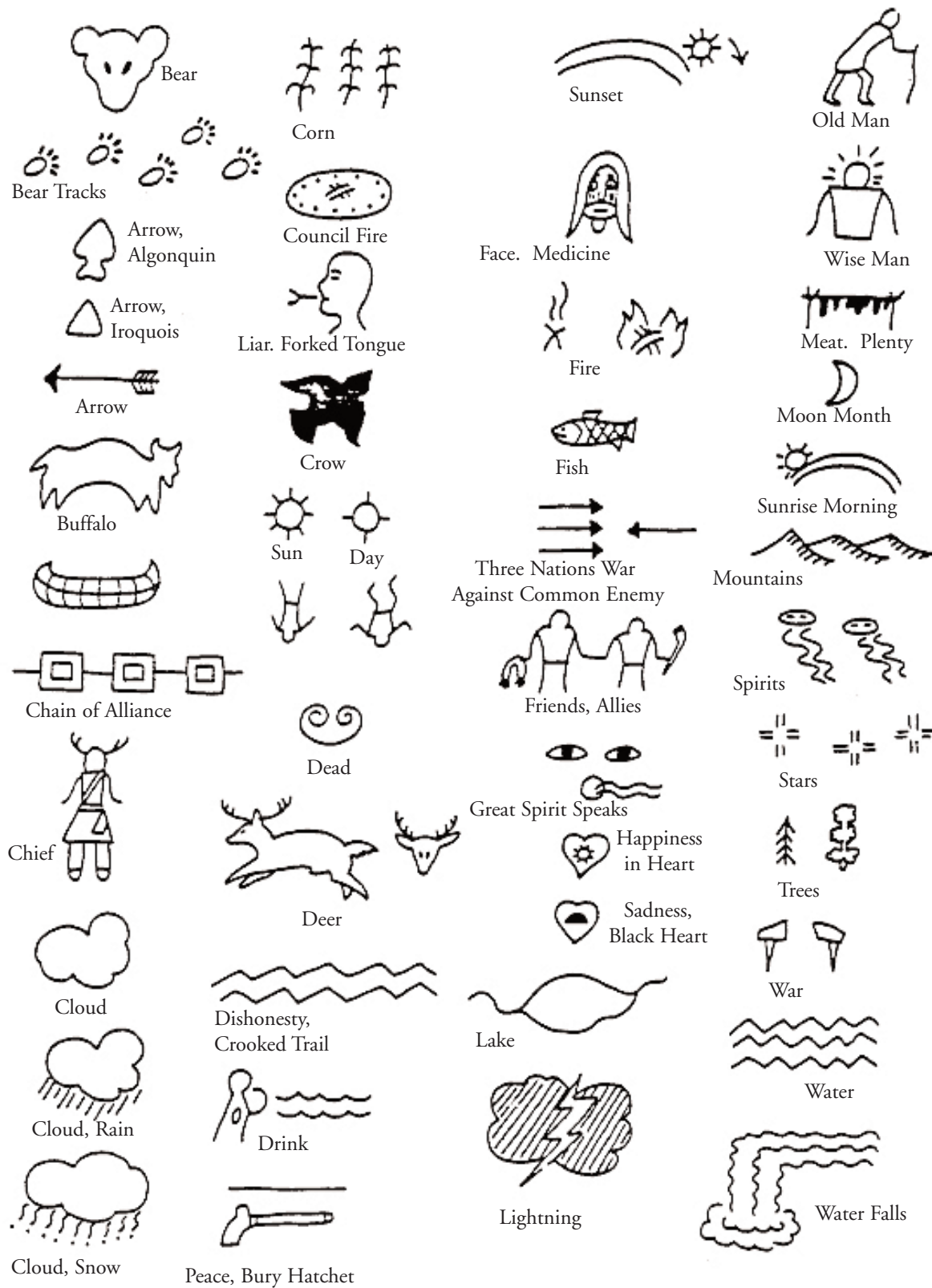
Photo by Chris Emerick, courtesy of Segerstrom Center for the Arts



NAVAJO SAND PAINTING

Black cross-bars represent pine logs; the circle, water. Figures of gods with their wives (goddesses) sit upon the logs. Round heads denote male; rectangular heads, female. Rattles and pinon sprigs bring male and female rains which bring forth vegetation. Arching over all is the rainbow goddess upon which the gods travel.

AMERICAN INDIAN SYMBOLS



These pictographs are used with the permission of Aren Akweks, Six Nations Indian Museum, Onchiota, New York.

INDIAN LEGENDS COME ALIVE!

TRANSFORMATION

LEVEL II Sample Lesson

INTRODUCTION:

Native American lore, legends, myths, and tales provide a wealth of material to dramatize, using 'story theatre' techniques. Vivid characterizations and well-constructed plots make them easily adaptable for drama activities.

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

- Create story theatre presentations using Native American myths and folklore. (**Creating & Performing**)
- Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to *Assessment* at the end of this lesson. (**Responding & Connecting**)

MATERIALS:

- A collection of Indian legends and stories. Selected props and costume pieces.
- *Artsource*® audio recording of *The Quillwork Girl*.

PROGRESSION:

- Ask the class to choose a Native American myth or legend to dramatize. Cast one person as the narrator who will thread the story along, revealing necessary information and setting up the dramatic scenes to be acted out. Read the tale to the class and then follow these steps to dramatize a story theatre version.
 - Outline the scenes in the story to discover the dramatic thru-line and record them on the blackboard.
 - List the main characters and choose three words that describe their personalities or physical characteristics.
 - Discuss the setting of the story. How many different locales are depicted? Ask the class how these places can be represented or acted out.
 - Refer to your plot outline; divide the scenes into three parts - beginning, middle, and end.
 - Cast the scenes. (By dividing the story into three parts, different students get a chance to portray the main characters.)
- Select simple props or costume pieces to help visually tell the story.

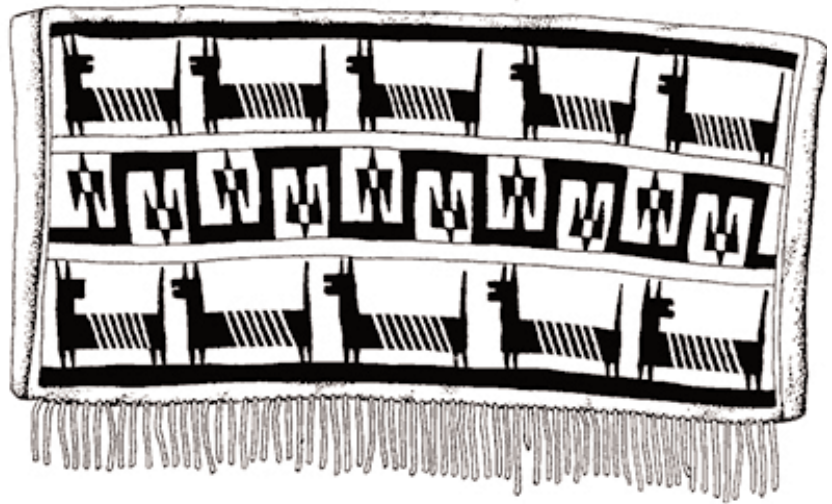


Geri Keams

Photo by Mark Harmel

- Perform the story improvising the dialogue and action.

- After the performance, discuss the scenes emphasizing the positive things you have seen. Be sure that in class discussions you refer to the names of the characters instead of the names of the students who played the parts. Did the improvisations adequately tell the events of the story? How did the actors use their creativity to bring the story to life?



Quill embroidery design on hide, Delaware

- Improvise the scenes again with a different cast using the suggestions for expanding or improving the scenes from the first go-around.

The important thing to remember in adapting a story into a play is that the process of creating the scenes rather than the end product should be the focus. The value of improvisation is that it leaves you free to interpret and develop the understanding of the various story elements, thereby continually extending the enjoyment of the story/play experience.

EXTENSIONS:

- Perform the story without words, pantomiming all of the action and expressing the emotions through gesture.
- Use legends from other cultures for story theatre presentations.
- Listen to the *Artsource*® audio recording of *The Quillwork Girl*. Take turns retelling the story in your own words.

VOCABULARY: story theatre, improvisation, character, dialogue, dramatic action

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DESCRIBE: Describe your favorite character in the story.

DISCUSS: Discuss the steps you went through to set up the dramatic scenes.

ANALYZE: Focus on one character at a time and discuss how different people portrayed the specific character. What aspects of the character changed in the various interpretations?

Emphasis on: Common Core - CA State Standards for Language - Reading; Writing; Listening; Speaking

SONG POEMS

ENDURING VALUES

LEVEL III Sample Lesson

INTRODUCTION:

The storytelling performance included traditional ceremonial chants or songs such as the *Beauty Way*, *Sunrise Chant*, and *Round Dance*. In Indian culture, truth, history and thought are preserved in rituals comprised of these poetic songs.

OBJECTIVES: (Student Outcomes)

Students will be able to:

- Compose short poems based on Navajo ceremonial chants and perform them as songs. (**Creating & Performing**)
- Describe, discuss, analyze and connect information and experiences based on this lesson. Refer to *Assessment* at the end of this lesson. (**Responding & Connecting**)

MATERIALS:

- Paper, pens, pencils.
- Simple percussion instruments: blocks, sticks, drums, etc.

PROGRESSION:

- Navajo ceremonial chants are often set to the stroke of a paddle, the rhythm of a running horse, or the thump of the corn grinding stone. Some songs are very short, while others last a whole night. The lyrics form a kind of poem, often using devices such as metaphor and personification. Here are two examples of Navajo chants:

- 1) *“My great corn plants,
Among them I walk,
I speak to them,
They hold out their hands to me.”*
- 2) *“The voice of thunder
Within the dark cloud,
Again and again it sounds,
The voice that beautifies the land.”*



Geri Keams

Photo by Chris Emerick, courtesy of Segerstrom Center for the Arts

- Ask your students to write a short poem patterned after the examples. Their subject matter can be drawn from any aspect of life and it should reveal thoughts or actions of significance. When the poems are completed, set them to a rhythm and perform them as chants or songs.

EXTENSIONS:

- Publish the completed song-poems in a class book.
- Perform the chants as a concert. Have each student make a costume piece symbolizing the theme of his or her poem to wear for the event.
- Choreograph dances to accompany the poems, explaining their messages through movement.

VOCABULARY: chant, metaphor, personification, rhythm, percussion

ASSESSMENT: (Responding & Connecting)

DESCRIBE: Describe your impressions of the two Navajo poems.

DISCUSS: Discuss the things you most like about the poem you wrote.

ANALYZE: Discuss how your poem is similar to either of the two Navajo poems and how it is different.

CONNECT: Share the topics that your class used for their poems and suggest other topics that would work well for this song-poem form

Emphasis on: Common Core - CA State Standards for Language - Reading; Writing; Listening; Speaking



Pueblo pottery



Acoma pottery